

## Chapter 3 – VISTA Mission and Project Goals

*“AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1965 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993, VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 40 years.*

*VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency, working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, strengthen community groups, and much more.” (“AmeriCorps VISTA”)*

“VISTA” stands for “Volunteers in Service to America.” As VISTAs, our mission is to combat poverty by offering capacity building efforts for different agencies. The four Capacity Building Associates are working to provide technical assistance and training for grassroots faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) across the state of Indiana. Our goal is to increase the capacity of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs), particularly those which are dedicated to creating and expanding programs that ultimately bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. To do this, we will be partnering with nonprofits from across the state, providing one-on-one training when we have the skills to do so, and connecting to technical assistance providers in areas like board development, volunteer management, financial management, and more when our office is not the expert. Other forms of assistance may take the form of group trainings and creating networking events for collaboration. To make this happen, we first need organizations, and we need insight into their organizational capacity to see if they are a good match for our project. From there, we realize that we will have to focus our capacity building efforts on the most needed areas. We need to know what small nonprofits need when it comes to increasing their capacity to deliver services to those that are in poverty. That is the intent behind the survey on which this report is based. Now that the data has been analyzed and processed, we have a frame in which to approach the participating organizations to make the most important community connections and deliver the most appropriate technical assistance.

Our goal is to help each organization solidify their future through sustainable, focused growth in their organizational capacity. While we understand that each locality is different, there are also some things that are the same. One perspective we brought into this project is that duplicate efforts can waste sparse community resources, especially at the local level. We recognize the benefits of collaboration over a multiplication of the numbers of nonprofits—helping the nonprofit sector grow stronger, not necessarily bigger. By analyzing local demographic data and by meeting with local leaders, our hope is to utilize each community's existing assets to overcome its challenges. A sincere effort will be placed on connecting nonprofits with resources in their area to continue to build their capacity after our project ends. Our term of service is only a year, and we do not want to allow those we work with to become dependent on us for outside consultation. Resources and assets are plentiful in every region of Indiana, so even more than directly providing technical assistance, we need to make sure these small organizations become plugged in to the existing infrastructure that is already able to meet their needs.

Thus, the intent of this report is not to be an academic discussion of the data results. We want it to be useful for all members of the nonprofit community in Indiana, particularly nonprofit leaders who took the survey and are looking to build their capacity. As readers will see, there is a surprising lack of connection between real and perceived capacity, so this information will be useful to nonprofit leaders, researchers, consultants, and associations. Indiana is in great need of stronger, more effective nonprofits because the need for their services has risen drastically over the past few years. The data from this survey cannot be used to make blanket conclusions about the overall state of Hoosier nonprofits, and it ought to be noted that this was never the intent because such research already exists. However, there are certain trends among these small, grassroots organizations that are worth recognizing because of their implications for capacity-builders. There is much at stake for the social-service providing community, and this survey and report serve as an attempt by OFBCI to learn and adjust its actions in serving these nonprofits.